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ABSTRACT

Information is presented about the history of student unions, purposes of the college union, programs, services, facilities, financing, along with basic facts about the Association of College Unions-International (ACU-I). Origins of the college union in England and the United States are traced, and it is noted that the union has rapidly spread among two-year and small four-year institutions. The union is the community center of the college, providing services, conveniences, and amenities to improve the daily life on the campus. It provides a cultural, social, and recreational program designed to promote students' personal growth and leadership. The most common union programs are art exhibits, concerts, film series, games and tournaments, forums, lectures, and numerous special programs and projects. Many unions are giving attention to physical well-being and the desire for outdoor activity. Activities are initiated and coordinated by various program committees that involve students. Information is also presented on facilities and services, financing and administration of college unions, ACU-I's purpose, membership, publication, and activities, which include helping unions improve programs and services. (SW)

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ASSOCIATION OF COLLEGE UNIONS--INTERNATIONAL

COLLEGE UNIONS:

FIFTY FACTS

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Origins of college unions and scope of present development

1 The earliest college union, founded at Cambridge University, England, in 1815, was literally a "union" of three debating societies. In 1823 students at Oxford University organized a union and in 1857 built their own quarters, including a debate hall, reference library, dining room, meeting rooms, lounges, billiard room, and offices. Many other unions followed in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Debating in the United Kingdom has continued as a prime union objective. Unions in England have played such a large part in preparing students for participation in public life that they have come to be known as "the cradle of the British Parliament."

2 A union was organized at Harvard in 1832 for debating purposes, as in the British universities. It was not until 1880 that the union concept at Harvard embraced the idea of a general club. The name "Harvard Union" was revived "in the hope that out of the Debating Society a large general Society, like the unions at Cambridge and Oxford, would grow." But a union building was not constructed until 1901. The first building in this country erected explicitly for union purposes was Houston Hall at the University of Pennsylvania. Built in 1896, it contained lounges, dining rooms, reading and writing rooms, an auditorium, game rooms, and student offices, and was given to the university by the Houston family as a "place where all may meet on common ground." From the beginning the Hall was governed jointly by students and faculty.

3 In the 1930s the leaders of the union effort in the United States, influenced greatly by the concurrent development and success of general civic recreation and cultural centers and by the desire to create a truer "community of teachers and students," saw the union as the campus counterpart of the "community center," with a positive educational and recreational mission to perform.

4 The most extensive union growth took place in the years after World War II, as enrollments surged upward and colleges and universities sought better means of fulfilling the living needs of students and faculty and as the possibilities of financing union buildings through borrowing became well established.

5 The union has rapidly spread among two-year colleges and small four-year institutions. Present statistics show that 44 percent of the institutional members of the Association have fewer than 2,500 students enrolled. These statistics also show that 259 members (or 29 percent of the total membership) are two-year colleges.

6 The college union movement has always been international in scope. The first union structure in Denmark was built ("Studenter-Foringen," an intercollegiate union in Copenhagen) in 1824, in Canada (McGill University) in 1907, in Australia (University of Sydney) in 1874, in Taiwan (Taipei Normal College) in 1915, and in Lebanon (American University of Beirut) in 1918.

7 A college union has no connection with, and should not be confused with, a labor union or student political action union. The first college unions were established in England 50 years before the first labor union was organized and 130 years before student political action unions were formed in Europe, Asia, and Africa following World War II.

Purposes of the college union

8 The Association of College Unions in 1956 unanimously adopted and in 1964 unanimously reaffirmed the following four-part statement of union purposes and functions:

> *The Union is the community center of the college, for all members of the college family—students, faculty, administration, alumni and guests. It is not just a building. It is also an organization and program. Together they represent a well-considered plan for the community life of the college.*
>
> *As the "living room" or the "hearthstone" of the college, the union provides for the services, conveniences, and amenities the members of the college family need in their daily life on the campus and for getting to know and understand one another through informal association outside the classroom.*
>
> *The union is part of the education program of the college. As the center of college community life, it serves as a laboratory of citizenship, training students in social responsibility and for leadership in our democracy. Through its various boards, committees, and staff, it provides a cultural, social, and recreational program aiming to make free time activity a cooperative factor with study in education. In all its processes it encourages self-directed activity, giving maximum opportunity for self-realization and for growth in individual social competency and group effectiveness. Its goal is the development of persons as well as intellects.*

The union serves as a unifying force in the life of the college, cultivating enduring regard for and loyalty to the college.

9 The current aims of the union have grown out of the widely held view among educators that what the college student does educationally in the hours outside the classroom is of major importance and that the social-cultural program for the student body at the union can give a new dimension to education—vastly expanding the time area and the means through which the college educates.

Union programs

10 Programs in unions are extensive and highly diversified. A recent survey has identified more than 140 categories of ongoing union program offerings.

11 Presentation of programs and activities is one of the prime functions of the college union. In nearly all unions (94 percent), these activities are initiated and coordinated by various program committees. These student committee members and their chairpersons serve on a volunteer basis, being compensated by the opportunity for new experiences and personal growth.

12 The more common union programs, offered by at least 75 percent of all unions, are art exhibits, concerts, film series, games and tournaments, forums, lectures, and numerous special programs and projects.

13 Popular program trends noted in recent times include:

- Mini-courses and leisure learning noncredit classes;
- Arts and crafts centers and instruction;
- Art print and plant sales;
- Traditional all-university events such as homecoming, student orientation, and open houses;
- Outdoor activities and equipment sales and rentals;
- Diversified interests in performing arts; and
- A tendency toward depth or breadth of programs, as in wide-ranging symposia and special "weeks."

14 More and more unions are giving attention to physical well-being and the desire for outdoor activity. Organized outing programs and instruction in skiing, sailing, canoeing, mountaineering, camping, and rock climbing are common.

15 Union programs are often closely related to the work of academic departments. Some unions join with other departments to teach courses in institutional management, student counseling, and group leadership. Others serve as a demonstration laboratory for course work in recreation leadership, journalism, crafts, social group work, and quantity food production. Others present publicly the work of music, art, and drama departments.

16 Research studies have shown that students who lead college union activities become more active participants in civic affairs and are more active as organization officers and as candidates for public office than graduates without union experience.

Facilities and services

17 Union buildings or facilities range in size from 1,500 square feet to 475,000 square feet. Information in the Association's Data Bank indicates that 50 percent of union facilities are less than 70,000 square feet in size while 14 percent are buildings which exceed 200,000 square feet.

18 There is scarcely a union more than ten years old that hasn't had to construct an addition, enter into major renovation, or in some cases build an entirely new building. Some unions are now two or three times larger than when they first opened. Between 1960 and 1979, 277 major union building additions were constructed.

19 The union has become a most complex and specialized kind of building. There is nothing else quite like a union. Although similar to civic community centers, unions are more inclusive and unique in their facilities; they may house dining halls, snack bars, coffeehouses, club facilities, theaters, art galleries, music rooms, libraries, crafts shops, chapels, meeting rooms, post offices, radio rooms, barber shops, outing facilities, and a multitude of offices under one roof.

20 The most frequently provided union facilities are lounges (91 percent of all unions), meeting rooms (89 percent), information center (86 percent), multipurpose room (85 percent), television-viewing room (83 percent), and cafeteria (82 percent).

21 College unions are placing more emphasis on cultural programs and facilities—good books in a browsing room, good paintings in a gallery, good music, films, plays,

and important lectures. In 40 campus-wide surveys of student needs for union facilities among more than 37,000 students, cultural facilities--particularly theater and auditorium—were supported by approximately two-thirds of all students and were exceeded in interest only by dining rooms, lounges, and ballroom-banquet halls.

A number of studies have shown that far more students participate in cultural activities when presented in the union than when offered elsewhere on the campus or in the college town.

22 Leisure-time facilities and services are common in almost all unions. Amusement machines are found in 93 percent, billiard tables in 92 percent, table tennis in 78 percent, and card room/table games in 70 percent of college unions.

23 A union is the principal, and often the only, facility provided to meet the dining needs of students and faculty who do not dine where they live. On smaller campuses the union is frequently also the dining hall for all or part of the student population housed in dormitories. Considering all unions together, more than half of the total building area is devoted to dining and related space.

24 Unions provide many special services which meet daily student and faculty needs: information desk, checkrooms, lockers, telephones, school supplies, book exchange, restrooms, ticket office, check cashing service, newspapers and periodicals, copy machines, postal service, and sometimes individual mailboxes.

25 The union serves the role of "town hall" on most campuses. It houses the offices for student government and many other service organizations, and it provides the rooms for hundreds of planning meetings and forums on current issues.

26 Most unions serve as hospitality centers for their colleges, providing facilities for parents and alumni and for educational conferences sponsored by the college.

Finance and administration

27 Most unions are financially self-sustaining in that they do not compete with academic departments for institutional funds. Rather, their funds are derived from building earnings (mainly food service, bookstore, games area, miscellaneous sales, and rental of space) and from

fees paid by students at the time of registration. Fees have become an important means of funding debt service and operation. According to ACU-I Data Bank information, students most frequently paid between $50 and $75 per year in fees. Some unions lease such operations as shops and food services to private operators.

28 With few exceptions, unions have been constructed without cost to taxpayers. More than half have been financed in part or in full by revenue bonds or loans on a self-liquidating basis. Approximately one-fourth have been built with funds contributed by a single donor or raised through a general subscription campaign among alumni, faculty, and friends. Surpluses from the operation of services, particularly dining halls and bookstores, have aided in financing larger similar facilities in a new union. In the case of publicly supported institutions, some have received direct appropriations from state or city governments to meet urgent needs for increased enrollments. In Canada, prepayment of rentals by banks for leased space has been one source of construction financing.

29 The union is typically college-owned property and is staffed by college-appointed administrators and advisers. Many service employees are students working on a part-time basis. In most cases, union employees are paid out of union income.

30 The prevalent practice in organizing a college union is to establish, under authority of the college trustees, a general union governing board comprising representatives of the typical college groups which use the union. These component groups are students, faculty, and other members of the college staff and alumni.

31 Program planning and administration is largely carried on by student committees with staff assistance and guidance. Program-related staff, in 72 percent of college unions, is responsible for both union program advising and coordination of campus-wide activities.

32 Studies have shown clearly that college union programming and student activities coordination not only are interrelated but also are viewed as a common function in a majority of institutions. There is a trend toward combining the positions of union director and director of student activities.

Association of College Unions-International

33 The Association of College Unions-International was founded in 1914 by student and staff representatives from the University of Illinois, Indiana University, Ohio State University, University of Michigan, Purdue University, University of Wisconsin and the Case School of Applied Sciences at Cleveland. One of the oldest intercollegiate associations in higher education, it is an international organization whose purpose is to provide an opportunity for unions to join in studying and improving their programs and services and to assist in the development of new college unions. ACU-I is a member of the American Council on Education.

34 Association membership numbers more than 900 colleges and universities in many parts of the world, but particularly in the United States, Australia, and Canada. Membership is also open to individual staff members on a "professional" basis and to students active in the union field. In 1982 there were more than 700 individual members.

35 The Association, a tax-exempt organization under United States law, maintains a central office on the Indiana University campus in Bloomington, Indiana. Since 1968 ACU-I has employed a full-time executive director and staff.

36 The Association holds an annual international conference where union professionals and other college officers can participate in a large variety of seminars and workshops, engage in discussion with top professionals in programming, management, and operations, and be exposed through the exhibit program to products and services available to the union. Approximately 1,000 representatives of some 450 institutions attend each year.

37 In the autumn of each year, the 16 regions of the Association hold regional conferences. These conferences allow for the exchange of ideas and the free flow of discussion concerning the functions and responsibilities of the union among students and professional staff. More than 3,000 students and staff members from nearly 500 institutions participate in the regional conferences each year.

38 Sixteen Regional Representatives for the various geographical regions assist in the general development of the Association and work with students and staff in developing regional programs. In addition, each region has a governing structure made up of students and staff who

provide direction for the region and assistance to the Regional Representative.

39 The standing committees of the Association foster studies and programs concerned with the arts, College Bowl, minority programs, outdoor programs, recreation, research, two-year colleges, and women's concerns.

Commissions and special committees are established as necessary to study specific issues and perform specific functions.

40 The Association inaugurated an intercollegiate games program in 1932. This program has now expanded to include regional and international intercollegiate billiards, bowling, table tennis, chess, trap and skeet, bridge, darts, backgammon, and table soccer tournaments. Amateur standards similar to those governing other college sports have been adopted.

41 The Executive Committee is responsible for the policy direction of the Association. All members of this group are volunteers, except for the executive director who is ex officio without vote. A network of more than 300 college union and student activities professionals serve in volunteer roles to create and implement programs and services at the regional and international levels.

42 The Association publishes an illustrated, printed *Bulletin* six times yearly, a periodic newsletter (*The Union Wire*), a directory of unions and staff members, numerous reference works, monographs, and research studies on building planning and operation, program aids, and standards for staff preparation and compensation.

All Association publications since 1914 have been put on microfiche and placed in 13 regional libraries. The publications may also be purchased from the Association central office. Supplementing the microfiche, the Association has an active publications program producing an average of four new publications each year. A complete list of available publications can be obtained from the central office.

43 The *Proceedings* of each annual conference, distributed to all members, contains 30 to 50 papers on matters of concern to all union professionals as well as a section devoted to the business of the Association.

44 An annual salary survey is conducted by the central office and is incorporated into a publication entitled *Standards for Professional Staff Preparation and Com-*

pensation in College Union Work. This publication outlines typical responsibilities and requirements of 17 positions in the profession.

45 The Association actively encourages research in the union and student activities field. It makes numerous surveys of union practices and policies itself and lends assistance wherever possible to authors, researchers, and graduate students doing these studies.

46 In 1976 the Commission on Educational Programs and Services was established to provide an ongoing and comprehensive program of training, development, and continuing education for persons involved with college unions and student activities. The annual conference program, publications and resource materials, and a diverse offering of seminars and workshops are presented annually by the Commission.

47 Millions of pieces of information about college unions are contained in the Association's computerized Data Bank. The Data Bank serves as an information warehouse for research and as a basis for articles about union programs, buildings, governance, financing, services, and staffing.

48 The Association operates a computerized employment service. The primary goal of this service, called ACUIRES, is the matching of people seeking employment in the college union and student activities field with job openings for which they are qualified.

49 A Volunteer Staff Registry, also computerized, contains background information about volunteers in the Association. Association leaders can utilize this resource, which lists volunteers' interests and their records of service, when searching for people to fill volunteer positions within the organization.

50 The Association is dedicated to a policy of Affirmative Action in its work and makes a conscious effort to encourage all of its members to participate both in its formal and informal activities.

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